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TOM BROKAW: Later today President Reagan gave a pep talk to the United States intelligence community, the people who have been trying to repair the damage from a recent series of American spy cases and defections. To make his case, the President appeared at dedication ceremonies for new facilities of the National Security Agency. That's America's top secret intelligence gathering agency. And as NBC's Andrea Mitchell reports tonight, the President's appearance was highly unusual, but the White House thought it was necessary in these troubled times.

ANDREA MITCHELL: The National Security Agency is so secret that no one is even supposed to talk about what it does.

Over the objection of some intelligence officials, however, the White House turned the dedication of the agency's new headquarters into a full-blown media event to boost morale after a series of spy cases.

PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN: Our most sensitive defense secrets and most advanced technology have been stolen, given to our adversaries out of misguided motives or attempts at financial gain.

MITCHELL: The intelligence community is still reeling from its losses. Most damaging, Ronald Pelton, who admitted selling secrets to the KGB after working for the NSA for 14 years. Edward Howard, the first CIA defector in 35 years. The Walker family, a spy ring that betrayed secret Navy codes. And the re-defection of KGB operative Vitaly Yurchenko.

Amid the fanfare of today's ceremony, some intelligence

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officials say there is another disturbing trend: decisions by recent Presidents to reveal the most sensitive secrets -- intercepted -- in order to promote foreign policy goals. The Carter administration leaked information about a Norwegian listening post to try to prove that Soviet violations of the SALT II treaty could be spotted. The Norwegians didn't want to share secrets again for years.

Most recently to try to justify the bombing of Libya, the President revealed the existence of intercepted messages.

PRESIDENT REAGAN: Our evidence is direct; it is precise; it is irrefutable.

MITCHELL: As a result, the Libyans changed their secret codes. And after the Soviets shot down the Korean airliner three years ago, the administration rushed to the U.N. with tapes of the Soviet pilot. Later these tapes proved to be poorly translated and misleading, to the distress of top analysts from the National Security Agency.

SEYMOUR HERSH: Their professionals feel that there's a continuing attempt by the political people to manipulate signals intelligence and communications intelligence.

MITCHELL: There're also new right-wing political pressure on the intelligence agencies. Amendments passed in the Senate this week will force the CIA to report a wide range of activities to an outside commission.

SENATOR JESSE HELMS: That there's a slight case of heartburn in some quarters out of town.

MITCHELL: A former CIA Director said the new requirements are ridiculous.

WILLIAM COLBY: What you've got is a pure case of an outside politician trying to make a little political hay by raising subjects with which he disagrees.

MITCHELL: One White House official said people who leak electronic communications ought to be hanged by the neck until dead, unless, he added, it's the President doing it for reasons of national security.

BROKAW: Also in his remarked at the NSA today, President Reagan mentioned the Moscow arrest of American reported Nicholas Daniloff. He said the United States will not tolerate the imprisonment of innocent Americans in retaliation for cracking down on other countries' spies. That a reference to the arrest here of Soviet Gennadi Sakharov.

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For their part, the Soviets said today that there has been no progress in the Danilooff case.